

US elections 2020: contested democracy

By: M.H. Lagarde

30/10/2020



In addition to knowing who is going to win the upcoming 2020 US Presidential Elections, one of the biggest mysteries to be revealed next November 3rd will be to know whether supporters of one side, or the other, will democratically accept the results.

Just few days ago, a survey carried out by Reuters news agency showed that “more than 40% of President Trump’s supporters and his opponent Democrat Joe Biden’s confirmed their rejection to the US elections results if their candidate loses.”

According to the survey, 43% of Biden’s supporters would not accept an alleged win of the Republican candidate, while 41% of those who want Trump’s re-election would not accept the win of former Democrat Vice-president.

To voice out their unhappiness, 22% of Biden’s supporters and 16% of Trump’s said they will participate in street protests or even riots if their candidate loses.

The uncertainty about what may occur once the final results are presented has been triggered after repeated warning made by security officials arguing that Russian and Iran have attempted to breach the US voting system and undermine the elections. And above all, the repeated red flags issued by the current President who notes that the process is “fixed” and a rise in mail-in voting will increase the possibilities of vote fraud.

While some analysts say the current polarization of the American society — especially in issues such as the government response to Covid-19 and lingering racism — may lead to a heated situation, others appear to be less pessimistic.

That is the case of Donald Green, political scientist at the Columbia University, who, based on the Reuters’ survey, said that the survey’s results alleviate his concerns about violent actions after the elections. However, he did not rule out that: “if election’s results are really close, or if one candidate may submit a credible allegation of vote fraud, it may unleash bigger unrest than the survey forecasts.”

SOME HISTORY

Another optimist is Alexander Cohen, associated professor of Political Sciences at the Clarkson University, in New York, who recently published an article in **The Conversation**, on the six times in which the US elections have been impugned.

According to expert Cohen's article:

- *In 1800, both Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr received the same number of votes in the Electoral College. Because no candidate won a clear majority of Electoral votes, the House of Representatives followed the Constitution and convened a special session to resolve the impasse by a vote. It took 36 ballots to give Jefferson the victory, which was widely accepted.*
- *In 1824, Andrew Jackson won a plurality of the popular and electoral vote against John Quincy Adams and two other candidates, but failed to win the necessary majority in the Electoral College. The House, again following the procedure set in the Constitution, selected Adams as the winner over Jackson.*
- *The 1876 election between Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel Tilden was contested because several Southern states failed to clearly certify a winner. This was resolved through inter-party negotiation conducted by an Electoral Commission established by Congress. While Hayes would become president, concessions were given to the South that effectively ended Reconstruction.*
- *The contest between Democrat John F. Kennedy and Republican Richard Nixon in 1960 was rife with allegations of voter fraud, and Nixon supporters pressed for aggressive recounts in many states. In the end, Nixon begrudgingly accepted the decision rather than drag the country through civil discord during the intense U.S.-Soviet tensions of the Cold War.*
- *Finally, in 2000, GOP candidate George W. Bush and Democratic candidate Al Gore tangled over disputed ballots in Florida. The Supreme Court terminated a recount effort and Gore publicly conceded, recognizing the legitimacy of Bush's victory by saying, "While I strongly disagree with the Court's decision, I accept it."*

An only the 1860 US election challenge ended in a war, the academician pointed out.

"After Abraham Lincoln defeated three other candidates, Southern states simply refused to accept the results. They viewed the selection of a president who would not protect slavery as illegitimate and ignored the election's results."

"It was only through the profoundly bloody Civil War that the United States remained intact. The dispute over the legitimacy of this election, based in fundamental differences between the North and South, cost 600,000 American lives."

2020 ELECTIONS

The concern hovering around the results after the elections to be held on November 3rd, besides the repeated warning of current President of a possible fraud and his threat he will not accept a defeat, are also grounded in previous events. During the 2016 presidential campaign, the then presidential candidate Donald Trump refused to commit to agreeing on adverse results in the US elections.

It is worth recalling that one of Trump's campaign aide, Roger Stone — in addition to being the youngest man involved in the Watergate scandal, he was also former aide in Ronald Reagan's campaign — was, as he boasts in a Netflix documentary **Get me Roger Stone**, the leading lobbyist against the Democrat vote in the elections held in Florida in 2000.

According to Stone, he was the one who, since the late 1980s, encouraged Trump to run for the US presidency and from that day onwards, he has been one of Trump's most faithful supporters even though the conservative political consultant and lobbyist abruptly quitted in the 2015 campaign in unclear circumstances: Trump said he fired Stone and Stone said he just quitted.

Nonetheless, the influence of unscrupulous Stone is undisputable, especially in the political projection of the tycoon. **Trump seems to be following some of the rules of his instructor: “It is better to be infamous than not to be famous at all,” or that of believing “voters, non-sophisticates, cannot make difference between entertainment and politics,” or “to communicate in politics, it is necessary to be noisy.” To Stone, it does not matter “what is being said, but how it is being said, instead.”**

In November 2019, Roger Stone was charged under the special prosecutor’s investigation Robert Muller on the ties of Trump’s campaign with Russia and was sentenced to 40 months in a federal prison, but Trump stepped in and commuted his sentence at the last minute last July.

According to the note released few days ago at **Mailonline** website: “Stone is still part of the private circle of Trump, serving as an informal assistant of the President.”

Other recent reference takes Stone to the 537 votes documentary, directed by Billy Corben, who made headlines when highlighting that he feared his documentary on the chaos lived in Florida during the vote counting of the 2000 election, which led to George W. Bush to the White House, might be a “prologue” of what may occur in the US presidential election on November 3rd.

In the HBO documentary, premiered last Friday, you can hear the tough guy Roger Stone say: “You go to elections to win.”

Will the ghost of Roger Stone emerge once again after twenty years in the vote counting in Florida? If that’s so, what will happen in the United States after November 3rd?

Nobody knows. What is certain is that whatever happens will affect directly on the already contested American democracy.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff
